

The Sabbath in the History and Experience of the United Church of God

Our experience doesn't begin when the United Church of God began in 1995. The beginning of the United Church of God is a very interesting story as it came about in the first half of 1995.

Our history with the Sabbath goes back longer than that. Most of you know that the UCG came out of the Worldwide Church of God, and are somewhat knowledgeable of the story of the WWCG.

The WWCG was founded by Herbert W. Armstrong. It wasn't always known as the WWCG. It was first known as the Radio Church of God. Herbert W. Armstrong was converted in 1927. **It was over the issue of the Sabbath Day.** (This is a well known story among those of the church.)

Herbert and Loma Armstrong had moved to Oregon in the mid 1920's from the Midwest where he had a successful advertising business. The downturn at that time led him to move west.

It was in Oregon where his wife met a lady who was a member of the Church of God 7th day and a friendship was struck up. This lady explained to Loma Armstrong about the Sabbath. When she told her husband, Herbert, he was quite upset, and set about to prove her wrong. The more he studied, the more he saw that she was right. Then he had to make some decisions. He accepted the Sabbath and of course there was other understanding that followed. He had been raised in the Quaker faith, but later became quite the secular business man, practically discarding any practice of religion.

The more he studied, the more He saw that the small church, the Oregon Conference of the Church of God, 7th Day, had the truth.

He began to preach for them and conducted a number of public Bible meetings which were very successful, when there were others who attempted the same thing and were not successful. His advertising experience, how to put things, and his education, and how to speak, served him well. He began to get results with his preaching and was successful in raising up numerous congregations with his preaching.

It was early in this period that the Herbert Armstrong began to be a distinct entity within the Church of God movement. In addition to his success in preaching, his radio program and the Plain Truth magazine, he and his wife observed the Holy Days – or Feast Days - of the Bible as outlined in Leviticus 23. He presented the idea of the observance of the Holy Days to the Church of God, 7th day, and A.N. Dugger, perhaps the most prominent leader in the Church of God at that time

rejected the idea (this was in 1937). A year later (1938) his credentials for preaching were revoked by the church, however, he continued his work and his work grew into what it became in the 50's all the way to the time that he died in 1986.

In 1947 he moved to Southern California and carry on his work there, and began the first of three universities that would exist. One of the purposes was to train young workers to take part in the ministry and to pastor churches of people who were called to this new way of life as a result of his preaching on radio. (In fact, the church was called, "The Radio Church of God"—because that was just about all there was—a radio broadcast with a magazine and other booklets). After he was able to train students in his the college, they began to pastor churches and the church grew. (This was the period that I came into it, when I enrolled in Ambassador College).

Herbert Armstrong died in 1986, and his replacement within 9 years had begun to systematically replace the teachings of the church with traditional orthodox teachings. It was envisioned that the Worldwide Church of God would become no different than one of the traditional churches (more evangelical in style and teaching). The Law of God was first minimized and done away. Since we followed the Biblical laws of clean and unclean meats, this was changed with only little outcry. This was one of the first practices to go! One could imagine the kind of division that it caused.

The Sabbath was one of the first to be attacked as not essential. Here is how it began.

The idea of the Sabbath itself was not at first dismissed. It was how the Sabbath was observed that was the first issue. The idea of rest on the Sabbath and that the Sabbath was to be observed to consider the things of God, seeking God (in a way that a person would do that he couldn't do if he were working (hard) for six days. So God says to rest from your ordinary and customary labors, and give the time to Him. Well, the idea began to be taken up that not only could we "do good" on the Sabbath but that you "should do good". This led quickly to various forms of recreation that one would do on the Sabbath, to where there was no time to devote to God. This led to, "if you can do various forms of recreation, then you might be able to do various forms of work". And the Sabbath became in a short time like any other day. The idea was quickly adopted that there was no requirement from God, (certainly not for salvation) to observe the Sabbath, since we are now saved by grace, just like all the other churches taught all along. And since that is the case one might as well recognized Sunday as good a day as any to worship God with church services.

I only relate this, because we can see how, what may have taken decades or even centuries to change in the church in the 2nd and 3rd century, occurred in a matter of weeks and months, in the Worldwide Church of God. The practice of

Sunday observance did not come until later, that is, a complete change where congregations made the choice to hold their meetings on Sunday began to occur and today there are some who still choose to meet on the Sabbath while the rest of their brethren hold their meetings on the 1st day of the week. It was intended by those who were in authority and leading the charge with the changes to our traditional beliefs, that the Sabbath was to be removed completely from the church as well as the Holy Days.

In the early part of 1995, Church Administration began to give the pastors ultimatums that the changes in the teaching - as they began to be adopted - had to be preached in our services and used in our teaching and counseling. When we refused, we were either set aside and someone else was brought into preach and pastor, or sometimes the pastor was fired. (So we have here a modern persecution on pastors who would insist on holding on to the Sabbath sanctity and observance.)

This is when the United Church of God was born. It happened to the Pastors in a short period of a few months in the first half of 1995. So it was on. We all knew who all the other pastors were, and we knew that there had to be life after this.

So we got together in Indianapolis in the first week in May 1995 and formed the United Church of God. We formed it in this way. We formed a structure, that the main body of governance would be based with the conference of Elders. That is all who were then elders would be the final authority in the church. The C of E then chose a council to run the church (as a board) who in turn selected an administration for the operations of the church. So we immediately organized in this way. We did not choose one man to be a leader in the form of a Pastor-General as we had before.

For two reasons. First we don't have a right as people to place one man in that kind of place in the church. If it is to be done, God would have to do it. Secondly, we felt that we could not put a person in the position where doctrine could be changed by one person or a few people. We have set it up that if one of our major teachings were to be changed it would have to be agreed to by 75% of the conference of elders.

So we had to begin from scratch. We catalogued the teachings that we all agreed to, brought over from what was previously instituted in the church, and set them forth as the Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God. [show booklet to audience]

The United Church of God is the largest of the churches to be reformed after the upheaval in the Worldwide Church of God. People have asked me why we are the largest. The United Church of God is somewhat unique in this way. When the changes began to be taught from the leaders of the church from the early and

mid 90's to when the Pastors were given the ultimatum about what they should preach, the pastors who reformed into the United Church of God, stayed with their congregation until the end, upholding the teachings as we had been taught, and taking the hit. It was our jobs that were on the line. We knew there had to be life after this, and somehow we knew that we were going to come through on the other side of this. And when the church came down on us, most of the congregations stood with their pastor! Who was teaching them the truth!

So we then began to meet with our congregations who themselves were not going to accept the changes in different premises. We established a central office, with our governance, and began to produce our teachings in literature that we immediately published. So a church was born.

We immediately adopted the teachings that were extant in our church before alterations were beginning to be made and we have continued the legacy of the teachings of the church as we have understood them for the almost 70 years before that.

The legacy is continued by the teachings, not the name! Jesus said, "you are my disciples, if you do what I command you." He didn't say, you are my disciples if you use my name. So, too, any body of people who continue faithfully in the teachings would be doing what Christ said to do, "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you". The right of legacy amongst the Church of God groups is not to an organization that merely uses a name, but the right of legacy falls to the ones who faithfully continue in the original teaching.

I should acknowledge here, the immense support given to us by the Seventh Day Adventist gave to us when they heard of our plight. This was especially so in the Los Angeles area, where you know the headquarters and facilities were of the Worldwide Church of God (now sold), and we had no place to meet (like on the very next Sabbath when it all came to a head), and the SDA church offered us their fine facility to meet in on the Sabbath afternoon. I believe we are still meeting there to this day. So they came to our rescue. And we will not forget their kind support and assistance they gave to us at a time when we so needed it. Indeed, some of our younger people attend your schools and colleges.

It was also a time when we had to shore up our teachings, and this is when most of our congregants became acquainted with Dr. Bachiocci's book, from Sabbath to Sunday. I remember ordering a couple of boxes from him at that time and shipped them to me (I was in the SF Bay area of California) and we distributed them to our people, and it was all very comforting and reassuring at a time when we had nothing in writing ourselves.

The issue we faced is this, immediately, not the idea of the Sabbath itself, but how the Sabbath is to be observed.

So, perhaps, in the time remaining, it is good to speak to the idea of unity in the manner in which the Sabbath should be observed.

It is an issue that still poses questions in the minds of some; and so from a church point of view it would be good to understand how you would approach such questions. It certainly should not be an issue over which we have division. However, the principles of Biblical interpretation would be well employed in this matter.

This was the issue that Christ confronted the Pharisees on. Christ is generally made out to be the one who is minimizing the law where the Pharisees are made out to be the ones who are upholding the law. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus upheld the law while the Pharisees were minimizing it and disregarding it altogether.

The contentions about the Sabbath were never about which day was the Sabbath nor were the contentions about whether the Sabbath was to be observed. And when Jesus gave His understanding about the Sabbath, there was never a hint that the Sabbath should not be observed. The issues always was how the Sabbath should be observed.

(It is interesting to note, this discussion is still on going among Sabbath keepers. One would think that we would have this resolved by now.) But we are in an ever changing world where many different kinds of situations occur that never occurred even a 100 years ago.

There were some things that occurred in Jesus day, that were not covered in the law, as it was written. So what do you do?

The Jews had a solution, that you formulate rules about how to keep the Sabbath to cover every possible situation that might occur.

But what if a new situation came up, or times changed; then you would need a continuing authority to tell you what to do.

So the law when it was stated applied to an imagined agrarian situation that the Israelites would face when they came into the Promised Land. Each man, or family would have their own land, his own hired people, he would own animals and all would keep the commandment, just like it is stated. A literalist would have to live this way if he were to observe the Sabbath in the way the commandment required. But the solution would not be to make rules that attempt to cover every situation.

So Christ came along and healed people on the Sabbath, in addition to teaching, which was lawful. They claimed that His healing was not lawful on the Sabbath.

On both occasions, Christ gave reasons that it was “lawful to do good on the Sabbath”.

At the end of the 2nd chapter of Mark and the beginning of the 3rd chapter of Mark is the occasion where Jesus was questioned about what He and His disciples did on the Sabbath. And it is here that Jesus gives two far reaching principles having to do with Sabbath observance. It should be noted that He did not address the issue of whether the Sabbath ought to be observed—He never did, because it was never an issue in the mind of Christ, nor would it ever be for the Church He would build.

On the same day, which was a Sabbath, Jesus disciples plucked corn from the fields, and on the same Sabbath Jesus healed a man.

He gave two great principles:

- 1.) The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.
- 2.) The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath began to exist at the time of creation of the earth, by virtue, first of the work of God to create, and then, His resting on the Sabbath.

What is accomplished by Sabbath observance has already been covered by Dr. B. But the other great principle is, Christ is the one to tell us how the Sabbath is to be observed as by His own example when He was here!

Christ is the authority that you and I should look to, to receive instruction, how the Sabbath should be observed. He is the one who created the Sabbath, He should know how it is to be observed.

It is here that Christ gave understanding as the lawgiver, (“I say unto you...”) about what is permissible on the Sabbath, not violating the intent of the Law, but speaking to the necessity of man. That is, to eat, because of hunger.

The work that is permitted is in the same principle of the priests who offer sacrifices on the Sabbath.

In answer to the accusation that He did what was not lawful on the Sabbath by the Jews as recorded by John, in John 5:16-17.

Joh 5:16 And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

Joh 5:17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

Joh 5:18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

Joh 5:19 Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

Joh 5:20 For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

Joh 5:21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth *them*; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

Here He answers the charge of breaking the Sabbath by healing on the Sabbath, not by appealing to what was allowed by the law of Moses in other areas as well as the Sabbath, but He agrees that He is working on the Sabbath, which work (like the Priests) is lawful.

What work is this?

God finished his work of Creation and what he made, during the first 6 days of the creation week. And rested from those works on the Sabbath, but did not rest from other works on the Sabbath. For instance, there is the work of sustaining the creation over that period. Certain aspects of life goes on.

For reference only:

[Now God rested only from such work as he had done the six days before; otherwise he *worketh hitherto*, he is every day working, sabbath days and week-days, upholding and governing all the creatures, and concurring by his common providence to all the motions and operations of nature, *to his own glory*; therefore, when we are appointed to rest on the sabbath day, yet we are not restrained from doing that which has a direct tendency *to the glory of God*, as the man's carrying his bed had. (2.) *I work*; not only therefore *I may work, like him*, in doing good on sabbath days as well as other days, but I also *work with him*. As God created all things by Christ, so he supports and governs all by him, Heb 1:3]

The Priests continued the work of performing the sacrifices on the Sabbath—which work had to do with worship, but also of atonement for sin, and purification from sin, and bringing one into a right standing with God. It was a work of restoration. This work continues instant in season, out of season, when it is needed, so nothing will lapse.

We are told, **(Phi 2:13)** “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure”. This work continues on the Sabbath, indeed is enhanced by the Sabbath.

Let us go on to fulfill the work of the spiritual growth within ourselves through Christ—and devote the Sabbath to work of spiritual healing and restoration.

END

Additional notes:

Mar 2:23 And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.

Mar 2:24 And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that **which is not lawful?**

To harvest was not lawful.

Mar 2:25 And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, **when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him?**

Mar 2:26 How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is **not lawful to eat but for the priests**, and gave also to them which were with him?

Mar 2:27 And he said unto them, **The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:**

Mar 2:28 Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

Mar 3:1 And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand.

Mar 3:2 And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him.

Mar 3:3 And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.

Mar 3:4 And he saith unto them, **Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days**, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

Mat 12:5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

Mat 12:6 But I say unto you, That in this place is *one* greater than the temple.

Mat 12:7 But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

Mat 12:8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

Mat 12:9 And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:

Mat 12:10 And, behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

Mat 12:11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift *it* out?

Mat 12:12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

Mat 12:13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

Stephen was accused for *blaspheming that holy place* (Act 6:13); but Christ, in a corn-field, was *greater than the temple*, for in him dwelt not the *presence of God* symbolically, but *all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*

It is Christ only, by the power of his grace, that cures us; he heals the withered hand by putting life into the dead soul, works in us both to will and to do.